

July 11, 2007

**Statement by Congressman Pete Stark
Supporting College Access and Affordability**

Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007. This bill provides the largest single investment in higher education since the Montgomery GI Bill of 1944, with no new cost to taxpayers.

Today, federal financial aid programs fail to meet the needs of many students. That means a college education is unattainable for many young people. Public university students can only expect one third of the cost of attendance at a four-year institution to be covered by the Pell Grant, down from two-thirds of the cost covered in 1980. This bill makes higher education more affordable by increasing the maximum Pell Grant by \$500 and increasing the number of eligible students by over half a million. These improvements are long overdue.

In addition to strengthening Pell Grants, this bill builds on other existing federal student aid programs to help provide our next generation with a chance to succeed. It lowers federal loan interest rates to improve accessibility and ease the growing debt burden of graduates. In 2004, one-fourth of all graduating students with loans carried more than \$25,000 in loan debt. Perversely, last year the Republican controlled Congress enacted the largest reduction ever to federal student aid programs to finance tax cuts for the rich. The College Cost Reduction Act (H.R. 2669) begins to reverse failed Republican policies by reducing the federal interest rate on student loans from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent over five years.

We must strengthen our education system if we hope to compete in a global economy. In addition to making college more financially feasible, careers in public service need to be rewarded. Quality elementary and secondary teachers are essential to our public school system, but in 2003-2004 their median salary was only \$31,704. Teachers deserve more than pats on the back. This bill provides up-front tuition assistance for aspiring educators who commit to teaching high-need subjects in underperforming schools.

This bill pays for itself by reducing some of the massive fees paid to the scandal-plagued student loan industry. Instead of subsidizing the profits of lenders, this bill puts money in the hands of low-and- middle-income students. Not surprisingly, President Bush is siding with the big lenders and he's threatened to veto this essential legislation. He and the Republicans in Congress continue to obstruct real progress in education and almost every other domestic priority.

We must address the rising cost of higher education, reinvest in our schools by attracting new teachers, and cultivate the next generation of American leaders. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting for America's future and supporting this bill.